

Be an Active Co-teacher

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Co-teaching, the pairing of general and special education teachers in a general education classroom, requires a high degree of expertise on the part of both teachers. Done well, it can be compared to a strong marriage—partners sharing and planning, reflecting and changing. Done poorly, it can be described as a blind date—co-teachers just waiting for the year to end.

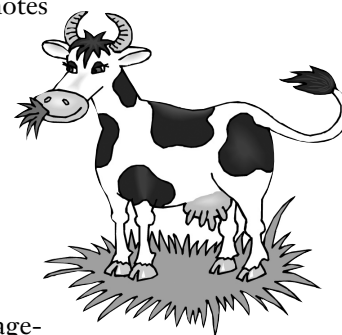
Each day, co-teachers must balance their roles as content and process specialists to deliver the appropriate services to their students. Although co-teachers can employ certain techniques, such as dividing the class into two or more groups and each teacher presenting either the same material (parallel teaching) or different material (station teaching) to a group (Cook & Friend, 1995), many times one co-teacher, usually the general education teacher, is the primary instructor and presenter for the entire class (Magiera & Zigmond, 2005). The other co-teacher is then left to take on a seemingly less important supportive role. In fact, one of the downsides of co-teaching is that one co-teacher, usually the special education teacher, feels less essential (Austin, 2001).

For there to be a high level of efficiency and effectiveness, the co-teacher who is not leading instruction

needs to know a variety of activities to employ (Murawski & Dicker, 2004). Although this co-teacher might not be directly presenting material, the role, nonetheless, should be essential and important, and observers should see how unique a co-taught classroom can be (Wilson, 2005). The following 20 ways illustrate meaningful activities for co-teachers to employ while their partners are presenting whole-class instruction.

1

Graze. The nonpresenting co-teacher walks around the room and keeps an eye on things, makes mental notes on student performance, and interacts briefly with students. In *grazing*, the co-teacher is generally helping with classroom management and overseeing student performance.



2

Poke, Prod, and Cue. The co-teacher roams the room with a focus on student performance. The co-teacher keeps students working by touching a shoulder, giving a student a pen, showing a student the page in the book, or clarifying directions. These type of cues can be developed so that students know when they should focus attention on the task.

3

Land. While *grazing* and *poking*, *prodding*, and *cueing* techniques keep students working, the coteacher isn't specifically looking at the quality of student work. When the coteacher *lands* for at least one minute by the desk of a student, he or she can look over the work, ask the student a question, or clarify a point.

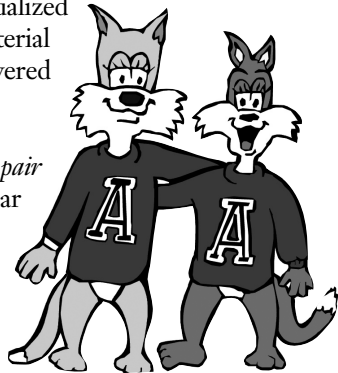


4

Target. *Targeting* extends the *land* technique by having the co-teacher stay with a student from 1 to 5 minutes. This extended time gives the co-teacher the opportunity to reteach concepts, clarify examples, or model the procedures. Although this individualized target lesson does divert the student's attention from the co-teacher who is directing the group lesson, it provides an opportunity for quick and intensive instruction so the student can then understand the group lesson.

5

Pair up. The co-teacher sits next to a student who is in particular need and provides a guided, individualized lesson on the material that is being delivered by the lead co-teacher. It is important not to *pair up* with a particular child repeatedly. On some occasions the teacher and student pair might need to go to another location to intensify instruction.



6

Form a Minigroup. The co-teacher takes a small group, three or four students who are having particular difficulties, and creates a more individualized mini-lesson on the topic. Again, it is important not to continually group the same students for a mini-group activity.

7

Observe Student Behaviors. There is great value in observing student performance. Singly taught classrooms rarely give the teacher an opportunity to sit and observe. The nonpresenting co-teacher can target one or two students who are having particular difficulties. While one co-teacher is presenting the lesson to the class, his or her partner can observe particular students. The observer can look for particular behaviors (time in seat; asking questions; ontask) and chart the number of occurrences, or do a running record of the student(s) behaviors, making sure to note the demands of the tasks.

8

Observe Student Questions and Responses. Using a seating chart of the students in the class, make a "check mark" next to the student's name when he or she answers a question, put a "?" next to the student's name when he or she asks a question, or an "r" when the student raises his or her hand. During planning time, the coteachers can analyze the student response rates and make intentional changes during instruction so more students (or specific students) are given the opportunity to respond to or ask questions.



9

Observe the Presenting Co-teachers' Questions. Keep track of the frequency and type of the presenting co-teacher's questions while he or she is leading the lesson. Categorize the questions according to a taxonomy (e.g., Bloom's Taxonomy) for level and complexity of questions. During co-planning time, co-teachers can analyze the questioning data and make adjustments in instruction.

10

Think of Adaptations and Modifications. As the lesson progresses, consider how adaptations and modifications could have improved success for some students. Make notes so that when it comes time to co-plan, the ideas can be incorporated.

11

Make an Assignment. Preplanning is often difficult, and even the best planned co-taught lessons can be refined after seeing students'

responses. While observing whole-class instruction, make an assignment based on the lesson that incorporates or integrates the students' knowledge on the topic. The assignment could be for homework, for the next day's Do Now (i.e., a beginning class activity that is usually short [about 5–10 minutes] that is used to set the stage for the lesson), or for an exit activity.

12

Scan an Assignment. The co-teacher collects the homework or Do Now that assesses a skill or students' understanding of a concept, using the time the other co-teacher is presenting to quickly scan the answers to determine which students are having difficulty. The nonpresenting co-teacher uses the information to *target teach* the concepts to individual students or make immediate suggestions to the presenting co-teacher about the areas in need of clarification.

13

Create a Graphic Organizer. While the co-teacher is leading the lesson, organize the content to an on-board graphic organizer, filling in the information onto the organizer as the presenting teacher covers material. The nonpresenting co-teacher can also create a graphic organizer that the students can use for homework. Students can transfer the notes they took in class to this new format, which will help reinforce the information presented.

14

Check a Notebook. Select a student and request his or her notebook. Check it, make written suggestions and comments, and help the student organize the material.

15

Check Homework. Have students leave their homework out on their desks. Circulate and check the homework, making sure to note the areas with which students had some difficulties.



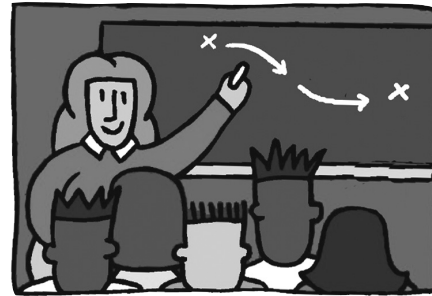
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Take Notes. Make a set of notes that can be compared to student notes. What did your notes have that most students didn't include? This makes a great future lesson on main ideas and details.

17

Write Directions and Notes on the Board. While the presenting teacher orally presents the material, the co-teacher can write the

directions or notes on the board, giving students the opportunity to both hear and see the material.



18

Create Exit Questions. Exit questions are given in the last few minutes of the class. They are questions that pertain to the lesson and can be answered quickly and briefly by students, who respond orally or in writing. Exit questions are an excellent way to assess what the students understood during the lesson. The nonpresenting co-teacher can make up a small set of (one to three) exit questions based on the lesson for the students to answer.

19

Interject a Different Point of View. Students in co-taught classes have a unique opportunity to hear co-teachers discuss differing points of view on a topic. During the class lesson, co-teachers can discuss different ways of approaching the same problem, alternate ways of solving a problem, or different views on the topic.

20

Verbalize Possible Confusion. When the co-teacher is presenting material that can be difficult for students to understand, the nonpresenting co-teacher can ask students questions to help them clarify the topic. This will help students who are probably experiencing a level of confusion but who are not asking questions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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